

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

CV 13-5340

LAVERN SIMS

Plaintiff, **COMPLAINT AND
JURY DEMAND**
-against-

THE CITY OF NEW YORK, POLICE OFFICER MARCO
ARTALE, POLICE OFFICER SONIA YI AND POLICE
OFFICER THOMAS MCBRIDE,

Defendants.

PLASSER, J.
GOLD, M.J.

x

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. This is a civil rights action in which plaintiff seeks relief for the violation of her rights secured by 42 U.S.C. §1983 and the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, and the laws and Constitution of the State of New York.

2. The claims arise from a June 16, 2011 incident in which officers of the New York City Police Department ("NYPD"), acting under color of state law, intentionally and willfully subjected plaintiff to, among other things, false arrest and false imprisonment.

3. Plaintiff seeks monetary damages (special, compensatory, and punitive) against defendants, as well as an award of costs and attorneys' fees, and such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

JURISDICTION

4. This action is brought pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1331, 42 U.S.C. §1983, and the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

5. The amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000.00 excluding interest and costs.

6. Venue is laid within the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York in that Defendant City of New York is located within, and the events occurred within, the

boundaries of the Eastern District of New York.

PARTIES

7. Plaintiff is a citizen of the United States and at all times here relevant resided in Kings County, City and State of New York.

8. The City of New York is a municipal corporation organized under the laws of the State of New York.

9. Police Officer Marco Artale was, at all times here relevant, a police officer of the NYPD, and as such was acting in the capacity of an agent, servant and employee of the City of New York. On information and belief, at all times relevant hereto, defendant Artale was involved in the decision to arrest plaintiff without probable cause or failed to intervene in the actions of his fellow officers when he observed them arresting plaintiff without probable cause. Officer Artale is sued in his individual capacity.

10. Police Officer Sonia Yi was, at all times here relevant, a police officer of the NYPD, and as such was acting in the capacity of an agent, servant and employee of the City of New York. On information and belief, at all times relevant hereto, defendant Yi was involved in the decision to arrest plaintiff without probable cause or failed to intervene in the actions of her fellow officers when she observed them arresting plaintiff without probable cause. Officer Yi is sued in her individual capacity.

11. Police Officer Thomas McBride was, at all times here relevant, a police officer of the NYPD, and as such was acting in the capacity of an agent, servant and employee of the City of New York. On information and belief, at all times relevant hereto, defendant McBride was involved in the decision to arrest plaintiff without probable cause or failed to intervene in the actions of his fellow officers when he observed them arresting plaintiff without probable cause.

Officer McBride is sued in his individual capacity.

12. At all times here mentioned defendants were acting under color of state law, to wit, under color of the statutes, ordinances, regulations, policies, customs and usages of the City and State of New York.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

13. Plaintiff is a 55 year old woman with no criminal record. On June 16, 2011, plaintiff and her sister attended funeral services for her cousin at 289 St. Nicholas Ave., Brooklyn, NY. At approximately 6:30PM, plaintiff and her sister took a walk around the block to take a break and get some fresh air.

14. Suddenly, Officer Yi approached plaintiff and grabbed both of her wrists. Officer Yi walked plaintiff to the parked car nearby, forced her hands on the hood, and searched her. No illegal contraband or weapons were found on or near plaintiff.

15. Plaintiff's sister was also led to the car, her purse was taken and she was searched. No illegal contraband or weapons were found on or near plaintiff's sister.

16. Without probable cause, plaintiff and her sister were placed under arrest, handcuffed and transported to the 83rd precinct. As part of another search at the precinct, plaintiff was ordered to lift up her bra, shake it out and remove her shoes and socks. Again, no illegal contraband was recovered.

17. Approximately thirty hours after her arrest, plaintiff was brought before a Brooklyn Criminal Court Judge, charged with Criminal Possession of Marihuana in the 5th Degree and released without bail. All charges have been dismissed and sealed.

18. At all times during the events described above, the defendant police officers were engaged in a joint venture and formed an agreement to violate plaintiff's rights. The individual

officers assisted each other in performing the various actions described and lent their physical presence and support and the authority of their office to each other during said events. They failed to intervene in the obviously illegal actions of their fellow officers against plaintiff, and agreed, shortly after the incident, not to report each others' illegal actions and to fabricate a story and falsely charge plaintiff with offenses.

19. During all of the events above described, defendants acted maliciously and with intent to injure plaintiff.

DAMAGES

20. As a direct and proximate result of the acts of defendants, plaintiff suffered the following injuries and damages:

- a. Violation of her rights pursuant to the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution to be free from an unreasonable search and seizure;
- b. Violation of her right to Due Process of Law under the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution;
- c. Violation of her New York State Constitutional rights under Article 1, Section 12 to be free from an unreasonable search and seizure;
- d. Violation of her New York State Constitutional right under Article 1, Section 6 to Due Process of Law;
- e. Emotional trauma and suffering, including fear, embarrassment, humiliation, emotional distress, frustration, extreme inconvenience, anxiety;
- f. Loss of liberty;
- g. Attorneys' fees.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION
(42 U.S.C. § 1983)

21. The above paragraphs are here incorporated by reference.
22. Defendants acted under color of law and conspired to deprive plaintiff of her civil, constitutional and statutory rights to be free from unreasonable search and seizure and to due process of law pursuant to the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, and are liable to plaintiff under 42 U.S.C. §1983.
23. Defendants falsely arrested plaintiff and failed to intervene in each other's obviously illegal actions and maliciously prosecuted her.
24. Plaintiff has been damaged as a result of defendants' wrongful acts.

SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION
(MUNICIPAL LIABILITY)

25. The above paragraphs are here incorporated by reference.
26. The City is liable for the damages suffered by plaintiff as a result of the conduct of their employees, agents, and servants, in that, after learning of their employees' violation of plaintiff's constitutional rights, they failed to remedy the wrong; they have created a policy or custom under which unconstitutional practices occurred and allowed such policies or customs to continue, and they have been grossly negligent in managing subordinates who caused the unlawful condition or event.
27. The City has been alerted to the regular use of excessive force and false arrests by its police officers, but has nevertheless exhibited deliberate indifference to such excessive force and false arrests; that deliberate indifference caused the violation of plaintiff's constitutional rights in this case.
28. The aforesaid event was not an isolated incident. The City has been aware for some time, from lawsuits, notices of claim, complaints filed with the Civilian Complaint Review

Board, and judicial rulings suppressing evidence and finding officers incredible as a matter of law, that a disturbing number of their police officers use excessive force, unlawfully search and seize citizens, bring charges against citizens with no legal basis, perjure themselves in charging instruments and testimony, and fail to intervene in and report the obviously illegal actions of their fellow officers. Nevertheless, the City has allowed policies and practices that allow the aforementioned to persist.

29. For example, the well documented failures of the Civilian Complaint Review Board (“the CCRB”), a City agency, to substantiate obviously meritorious citizen complaints have gone uncorrected. The CCRB regularly finds complainants lack credibility based on the fact that such complainants have also brought lawsuits to remedy the wrongs they have experienced, a practice that often results in not substantiating the most serious charges brought to them. In addition, the CCRB virtually never initiates their own findings of false statements against officers who have made false statements to the CCRB in their own defense, nor do they initiate findings that officers have failed to report their fellow officers’ misconduct; thus, officers have no real incentive to come forward, or to testify truthfully at the CCRB. The CCRB has no enforcement mechanisms once making a finding against an officer; it can only make recommendations to the NYPD, once finding misconduct by an officer.

30. The NYPD, once receiving a substantiated complaint by the CCRB, fails to adequately discipline officers for misconduct. The NYPD Department Advocate, which is endowed with the responsibility of following up on substantiated CCRB charges, is understaffed and underutilized. Furthermore, in the extraordinarily rare event that the CCRB substantiates a complaint and the Department Advocate proves the case in an internal trial against an officer, the police commissioner still maintains the power to reduce the discipline against such an officer.

31. Further, the City has no procedure to notify individual officers or their supervisors of unfavorable judicial review of their conduct. Without this notification, improper search and seizure practices and incredible testimony go uncorrected. Additionally, according to a report of the New York City Bar Association issued in 2000, the City has isolated their law department from the discipline of police officers, so that civil suits against police officers for actions taken in their capacity as police officers have no impact on the officers' careers, regardless of the outcome of the civil actions. Alan Hevesi, as New York City Comptroller, in 1999 reported that there was a "a total disconnect" between the settlements of even substantial civil claims and police department action against officers.

32. The City is aware that all of the aforementioned has resulted in violations of citizens' constitutional rights. Despite such notice, the City has failed to take corrective action. This failure and these policies caused the officers in the present case to violate plaintiff's civil rights, without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, although the City has been on notice, through plaintiff's complaints to the CCRB from the first day of the incidents complained of, the City has failed to remedy the wrong.

33. Plaintiff has been damaged as a result of the deliberate indifference of the City to the constitutional rights of the City's inhabitants.

WHEREFORE, plaintiff demands judgment against the defendants, jointly and severally, as follows:

- A. In favor of plaintiff in an amount to be determined by a jury for each of plaintiff's causes of action;
- B. Awarding plaintiff punitive damages in an amount to be determined by a jury;

- C. Awarding plaintiff reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements of this action; and
- D. Granting such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

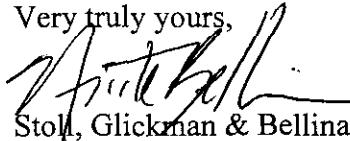
JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff demands a trial by jury.

DATED: Brooklyn, New York
September 24, 2013

TO: New York City
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100 Church Street, 4th floor
New York, NY 10007

Police Officer Artale
Police Officer Yi
Police Officer McBride
83rd Precinct
480 Knickerbocker Avenue
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Very truly yours,

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